

New Report Affirms Verdict: Ray Alone Killed King

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Evidence Is Overwhelming, Investigators Say

By EMILY YELLIN

MEMPHIS, March 27 — Findings released today from the third official investigation into the 1968 assassination of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. have once again ruled out everyone but James Earl Ray in the killing of the civil rights leader.

"They are always issuing reports on me," said Mr. Ray, 70, in a telephone interview this afternoon from the Lois M. DeBerry Special Needs Facility, the prison in Nashville where he remains ill with a life-threatening liver disease and is serving out his 99-year sentence.

"I don't even pay attention anymore," Mr. Ray said. "The district attorney just wants me to die in prison. They don't want the truth to come out, and the truth is that I did not shoot Martin Luther King. I think the F.B.I. was behind it."

But today's 12-page report, the result of a seven-month task force investigation conducted by the Memphis District Attorney General, William Gibbons, concluded otherwise.

In a cover letter accompanying the report, Mr. Gibbons said his office "remains absolutely convinced of James Earl Ray's guilt in the murder of Dr. King — the evidence against him is overwhelming." The letter concluded by saying, "Barring further credible information which could lead to the indictment of someone in addition to Mr. Ray, the district attorney's office considers the investigation closed."

Today's report was made public eight days before the 30th anniversary of Dr. King's murder, which took place on April 4, 1968, on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel in Memphis. The report put forth conclusions on two specific aspects that were not fully covered in either the House Select Committee investigation in 1978 and 1979 or the initial investigation of the case by the Memphis authorities in 1968 and 1969, and that have been advanced in recent years by Mr. Ray's supporters as alternative theories on who shot Dr. King. And it finds both allegations lacking in "credible evidence."

First, after detailing interviews with numerous witnesses, the report concluded that a Memphis cafe owner, Loyd Jowers, who said on television in 1993 that he was enlisted to hire someone to murder Dr. King, cannot be prosecuted in the killing.

Then the report outlined the inves-



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James Earl Ray dismissed a new report that said he alone killed the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

tigators' effort to look into allegations about a New York man who Mr. Ray and his lawyer, William Pepper, have said was the mysterious "Raoul" — the man behind the plot to kill Dr. King. The report never identified "Raoul" by his full name to protect his privacy because it concluded that the man "had nothing to do with the assassination," and that "no charges can or should be brought" against him.

Finally, the report briefly addressed other recent allegations about the assassination, and found none worth investigating further. And it included two paragraphs on suggestions that the Mr. Ray's brothers, John and Jerry, assisted him in the assassination. But it ruled that "only if the brothers had advance knowledge and aided in the murder would they be subject to prosecution as principals in the crime," and added, "Such evidence does not exist at this time."

This third investigation reached the similar conclusion on James Earl Ray's guilt as the two previous

investigations. Even though the King family supports Mr. Ray's quest for a new trial, others called this latest report definitive.

"This report once again conclusively depicts how the conspiracy theories being put forward by Mr. Pepper on behalf of James Earl Ray are demonstrably false," David Garrow, the Pulitzer Prize-winning author of a number of books on Dr. King and the civil rights movement, said today. "When the same people over and over again have put forward allegations that time and time again are disproven, at some point serious journalists and historians

Barring new credible information, an inquiry is closed.

should stop responding."

And Robert Blakey, chief counsel to the House Select Committee investigation in 1978 and 1979, asked, "At what stage do we say 'enough is enough and close this case?'"

But Mr. Pepper, Mr. Ray's lawyer, called the latest investigation "woefully lacking." He added, "They have come to their conclusions without even talking to significant witnesses." He then named a number of "key people" who he said had never been interviewed by Federal or state investigators.

Mr. Pepper said he was saddened that he would probably never get the chance to defend Mr. Ray in court.

The lawyer said he would now focus on trying to get Mr. Ray a medical furlough so he could spend the last days of his life out of prison, and would try to get records from the 1978 Congressional investigation unsealed in the hope they would exonerate his client.

Mr. Ray said again today that he was not a racist or a murderer. He also said he had nothing to be happy about, and added: "I keep coming in and out of comas, and we have not gotten a trial to clear my name. I think about dying. I'm facing it. I'm not scared of dying, but I'm also not sending for Dr. Kevorkian any time soon, either."